Hill Tribes

Almost all are of low birth and are crude and illiterate. They have married Thai or Kha women and thereby founded a stock of halfbreeds. This race is destined to merge with the mass of the Laotians or Thai population and through successive crossings lose all distinctive characteristics.

The Meos. The Meos are also Yunnanese who have retained a degree of independence and have not been marked with the Chinese imprint like the Hos or adopted baggy clothes and the custom of wearing their hair only in a braid.

They are distributed in groups of a few families each of which live on the peaks of the mountains in northern Laos and the Sib-Song-Chau-Thais. They can be divided into three great families--the blacks, the whites and the reds--which owe their names to the color of certain parts of the women's costume. Thus among the black and red Meos skirts or jackets are light blue in color, but the latter have a wide collar ornamented with black or red embroidery. Finally, a small turban with black and white checks or of red material, depending on the case, completes their garb. Among the white Meos, the women wear a skirt and jacket of unbleached cloth, with a white and blue embroidered collar.

The men's clothing is light blue in all cases. It is composed of a broad pair of trousers which come down somewhat below the calf, where the legs are drawn tight, and of a short, tight-sleeved jacket which buttons down one side.

A turban winds around the head and covers their long hair, which may be rolled or braided.

The women's hair is parted and wound on the upper part of the nape of the neck in a coil. (1)

(1) See Appendix XIX.

The Meos practice ancestor worship primarily, like many Asian peoples. They have no pagodas or bonzes, but elders perform the office of priests and also administer justice.

[268] The Meos bury their dead, and make animal sacrifices on the occasion of births, marriages and deaths so as to gain the favor of the "Phis" or multiple and varied genii in whose existence and influence they believe.

Marriage is as simple as among the other peoples of Laos.

Divorce may occur either through mutual consent or in the case of adultery.